



DROWNING IN PAPER?

The ideal home office is both attractive and efficient—here's how to get there **BY ALEXANDRA ROBBINS**

When I recently moved my home office from one room to another, I wanted a fresh start. I had cleaned out the drawers in the office as often as I clean the trunk of my car—which is to say never.

I'm the kind of person who, if given an appealing organizational system, will use it. But I don't have the skills—or desire—to come up with that system on my own.

When a friend alerted me to a LivingSocial deal of \$75 for three hours of a professional organizer's time, I pounced. I hoped that a more organized office would increase my productivity as well as create a calmer working environment. Local organization experts say that theory is sound.

"Being organized physically gives you a lot more space mentally to function," says Rachel Strisik, owner of Rachel and Company, an organization firm in Bethesda. "Seeing physical clutter creates mental clutter."

My designated declutterer, Flavia Campos, founder of DC-based Soothing Spaces, has some questions for me as we spend the first stage of the process emptying every drawer in the room. "Why do you have three staplers?" she asks. Campos tosses two of them into a trash bag labeled "donation." Her other bags are earmarked for garbage and for items to move to other rooms.

I expected this initial sorting to take up all of our time, but it goes by surprisingly quickly. Plus it unearths some pleasant surprises ("So that's where my Gonzo Pez dispenser keychain went!") and some giddy ones ("There's still Pez in it!").

My biggest dilemma is figuring out what to do with my office supplies, which were stuffed in a file cabinet drawer that had become haphazard and impossible to navigate. It turns out I'm not alone. DC organizer Scott Roewer, winner of the National Association of Professional Organizers' 2012

Founders' Award, the industry's highest honor, once discovered 25,000 paper clips in a client's home office. The client would buy boxes from Costco, lose track of where he put them, then purchase a new box.

If you ask local organization experts what most clients' biggest challenge is, without hesitation they'll tell you it's the paper.

"People in Washington save papers here more than in other cities, even newspapers," Strisik says. "Not that they're more old-school, but they're education-based—their knowledge basically comes from books or other *physical things* and they want to hold onto the physical paper."

Paper clutter is the result of "delayed decisions," Roewer says. When people don't know what to do with a document, they simply set it down anywhere. "A few snowflakes are fine, but when you don't shovel the driveway it piles up," he says. "Ask yourself, 'What's going to be my rule? Do I need to save receipts? Am I truly going to reconcile them with my credit-card statements?' If people stop the inflow of things, they're going to be miles ahead."

To corral my papers, Campos suggests I buy a nice basket to place under my desk for my "to shred" pile. For my desktop surface, I find an interesting wooden organizer at World Market that can separate mail from urgent work.

My mountain of office supplies requires a multipronged approach. Campos makes use of a closet to hide a four-drawer cart in which I was storing some papers. We file the papers elsewhere and instead organize half of the supplies into the drawers. Campos has—and loves—a label maker; she labels each drawer so I can easily locate supplies. For the rest of them, Campos recommends installing a shelf at eye level in the closet to maximize storage space and keep supplies out of sight until I need them. I'm able to do this myself after a quick trip to Home Depot.

By the end of the session, we've conceptualized a place for every item in the office. By the end of the weekend, I've put everything away. And by Monday, I'm happily back at work—with a clearer mind, a calmer outlook, and a now-empty Gonzo Pez dispenser watching over me from a newly organized bookcase.

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